

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES TO WATCH

Hilliard Horizon Elementary School New Horizons

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Urbanicity: Suburban

Location: Columbus, Ohio

Grades: K-5

21st CCLC Enrollment: 453

Percentage of All Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 50%

Demographics: Caucasian: 55%, Black/African American: 20%, Hispanic: 12%, Multi-Racial: 6%, Asian: 5%, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 1%

Hours of 21st CCLC Program Operation:
7:15 a.m. – 8:50 a.m., 3:15 – 6:30 p.m.

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships Opportunity Conditions Addressed

Process Conditions:

Linked to Learning
Relational
Developmental
Collaborative
Interactive

Organizational Conditions:

Integrated

A Culture of Learning and Continuous Improvement to Strengthen Family Engagement with All Families

Hilliard Horizons 21st CCLC's (HH) first big family event two years ago was a math and literacy night. It was intended to be a huge success. The 21st CCLC staff and school principal, Hillary Sloat, were shocked to learn that parents weren't interested in the literacy and math experts they had invited. Instead, families packed the rooms for the sessions on parenting, mental health, and counseling. That night also revealed a segment of families that were not being served.

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Back to the Drawing Board to Improve Family Engagement

The family night offered many lessons to redirect family engagement practices to better serve the interests and needs of all families. Staff knew they needed to change the way they partnered with parents. As a result, they hosted a series of brainstorming sessions that included parents. Staff conducted surveys of families and received a near 100% return rate. Families identified some easy-to-implement practices, including family game nights and services for families geared toward raising healthy children and managing family challenges. Staff also learned they needed to develop a better understanding of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds in their school community.

Staff took a parent engagement class with an outside expert who helped them outline concrete steps to better meet families' needs and reach out to community organizations for help. HH dramatically changed the program to better incorporate family input. Now there are before school and afterschool programs that include English classes for families. Parents signed up for these classes immediately. Parents also bring relatives and invite community members. "They'll bring their neighbor, their grandmother. It's really wonderful because the classes coincide with the kids' classes in the afterschool program," says Sloat. A counseling agency also provides ongoing classes and groups for families.

Professional Development to Expand Understanding of Families' Cultures and Religions

The school has a sizable Muslim community, so Sloat reached out to the nearby Noor Islamic Center. The Center hosted a teacher night that was the first collaboration between the Center and HH. A group of teachers and program staff learned more about the Muslim community and Islam. Staff members gained practical insight about the Muslim community including information about how many male students were also studying the Koran at their local mosque. They learned about the importance of Friday nights as high prayer time. Often, the program scheduled family activities and events on Fridays. As a result, they changed their calendar and no longer host family activities on Friday nights.

Positive Results and Ongoing Practice of Getting Out in the Community

The redesign of the program resulted in a 400% increase in family participation in program activities.

"We will go to the large apartment complex where a lot of families live. I have done presentations at that apartment complex, and the HH media specialist leads computer classes there. We've learned that we have to meet families on their own territory. Then, they feel so much more comfortable coming into the school and program or helping out when we ask," says Sloat.

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"I feel like the school day is the body and the 21st CCLC afterschool program is the arms. We are really able to wrap our arms around all of our families and students, especially those who really need it, with this program. — Hillary Sloat, Principal

TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Build cultural competence among staff by developing partnerships with organizations and institutions that also have a vested interest in supporting families in your program.**
 - o Attend open houses of nearby cultural, ethnic, community and religious organizations that reflect your families.
 - o Reach out to cultural, religious, and other organizations that may want to partner with your program to support families.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Recognize family engagement expertise in your community and tap into it.** Utilize outside resources that can provide crucial input and assistance to jumpstart your family engagement.
- **Embrace a culture of continuous improvement and know that your work with families will continue to improve.** Apply a growth mindset as an intentional learning and doing community.

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